

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 VIENTI 00292 01 OF 02 120420Z

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 AID-05 EB-08 ORM-02 /098 W
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R 120300Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7710
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0292

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID UNHCR PINS PDEV SHUM SOCI SREF SPOP LA HU UNDP EAGR

SUBJ: UN REPORTS ON CONDITIONS IN THE PLAIN OF JARS

REF: (A) VIENTIANE 0190, (B) VIENTIANE 0114, (C) VIENTIANE 0050

SUMMARY: UNHCR AND UNDP OFFICIALS RECENTLY TOLD EMBOFF ABOUT VISITS BY WESTERNERS TO PHONSAVANH IN THE PLAIN OF JARS IN JANUARY. UNHCR OFFICIAL SAID HE SAW NO EVIDENCE OF SOVIET AID PROJECTS BUT UNDP OFFICIAL MET ONE SOVIET AID TECHNICIAN ON HIS RETURN FLIGHT TO VIENTIANE. BOTH UN OFFICIALS REPORTED LACK OF FOOD, FARM EQUIPMENT, DRAUGHT ANIMALS, AND LAND FOR THE GROWING POPULATION IN THE AREA. INSUFFICIENT RICE PRODUCTION IN THE PLAIN MEANS THAT POPULATION WILL CONTINUE TO DEPEND ON OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVE DURING THE COMING YEAR AND POSSIBLY MORE TO COME.

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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00292 01 OF 02 120420Z

1. MARTIN BARBER, UNHCR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR, TOLD EMBOFF ABOUT A VISIT UNHCR AND LAO OFFICIALS MADE TO THE PLAIN OF JARS JANUARY 31. UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN LAOS, ANGELO RASANAYAGAM, UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE IN NETHERLANDS, CORNELIUS BROUWER, AND LAO OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND DEFENSE MADE THE TRIP WITH BARBER.

2. THE DELEGATION WAS FLOWN BY LAO ARMY HELICOPTER TO PHONSAVANH ON THE PLAIN OF JARS WHERE THEY TOOK A JEEP TO VISIT A CLINIC BUILT WITH UNHCR ASSISTANCE. LATER THE DELEGATION VISITED LANGON VILLAGE WHERE 57 FAMILIES HAD BEEN RESETTLED LAST YEAR WITH UNHCR ASSISTANCE.

3. BARBER TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE POPULATION OF XIENG KHOUANG PROVINCE WAS 58,000, OF WHOM 43,000 HAVE BEEN RESETTLED WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS. HE SAID THE POPULATION OF PAEK DISTRICT, IN WHICH PLAIN OF JARS IS LOCATED, WAS 33,000, OF WHOM 23,500 WERE RESETTLED WITH UNHCR ASSISTANCE IN 1975 AND ANOTHER 3,000 IN 1976. BARBER EXPLAINED THAT THE REMAINING PEOPLE THAT HAVE RESETTLED IN THE PLAIN OF JARS WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS ARE EITHER FARMERS WHO HAVE COME THERE ON THEIR OWN IN SEARCH OF BETTER FARM LAND AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE OR HILLTRIBES PEOPLE WHO MUST NOW QUIT TRADITIONAL SLASH AND BURN AGRICULTURE TO SETTLE IN PERMANENT COMMUNITIES.

4. ACCORDING TO BARBER, THE TOWN OF PHONSAVANH HAD GROWN CONSIDERABLY SINCE HIS FIRST VISIT OVER A YEAR AGO, PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THE UNCONTROLLED INFLUX OF THESE TWO GROUPS. BARBER SAID MUCH OF THE CHOICE FARM LAND IN THE PLAIN OF JARS WAS ALREADY PARCELED OUT AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOW SEARCHING FOR UNUSED VALLEY LANDS OUTSIDE THE PLAIN TO RELOCATE THE HILLTRIBE PEOPLES AND LANDLESS FARMERS.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00292 01 OF 02 120420Z

5. BARBER SAID HE SAW NO EVIDENCE OF SOVIET AID IN PHONSAVANH. NO BUILDING HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED HIGHER THAN ONE STORY BECAUSE OF LACK OF PROPER BUILDING MATERIALS TO WITHSTAND THE STRONG WINDS. MOST OF THE BUILDINGS WERE BAMBOO HUTS COATED WITH MUD. HE SAID THE PHONSAVANH AIRPORT WAS A SHORT GRASS STRIP IN THE CENTER OF TOWN WHICH SHOWED NO EVIDENCE OF BEING EXTENDED. HE SAID THAT THE AIRPORT THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE EXTENDED WITH SOVIET AID WAS LOCATED ABOUT EIGHT MILES FROM PHONSAVANH BUT THAT HE UNDERSTOOD NO WORK HAD YET STARTED ON IT.

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00292 02 OF 02 120436Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0292

6. BARBER SAID HE SAW FEW SOLDIERS CARRYING GUNS
AND NO ONE THAT HE RECOGNIZED AS BEING CHINESE OR VIET-
NAMESE.

7. HE DESCRIBED THE FARMERS IN THE PLAIN OF JARS AS
"CRUSHINGLY POOR" AND SAID LITTLE PROGRESS HAD BEEN
MADE WITHIN THE PAST YEAR TO IMPROVE THEIR LOT. HE
EXPLAINED THAT FARMERS HAVE BEEN SLOW TO CULTIVATE LAND
FOR FEAR OF UNEXPLODED BOMBLETS WHICH SANK INTO RICE
FIELDS AND NOW LIE ABOUT SIX INCHES BELOW THE NOW DRY
SURFACE. LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS TOLD BARBER
THAT SINCE 1975 FIFTEEN PEOPLE IN A SUBDISTRICT OF
3,500 PEOPLE IN PAKK DISTRICT HAVE BEEN KILLED BY SUCH
BOMBS WHILE TILLING THE SOIL WITH HOES.

8. ANOTHER FACTOR DETERRING MORE CULTIVATION IS THE
LACK OF DRAUGHT ANIMALS AND EQUIPMENT. LOCAL OFFICIALS
TOLD BARBER THAT THERE WERE 83,000 WATER BUFFALOS IN
THE DISTRICT BEFORE THE WAR BUT ONLY 250 SURVIVED AS OF
1975. AT PRESENT THE BUFFALO POPULATION IN THE PLAIN
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PAGE 02 VIENTI 00292 02 OF 02 120436Z

OF JARS HAS INCREASED TO 2,100, LARGELY BECAUSE OF A
PROGRAM UNDER WHICH PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES LEND KIP TO
FARMERS WHO JOURNEY BY FOOT TO PAKSANE AND THAKHEK TO
PURCHASE AND DRIVE THE ANIMALS BACK TO THE PLAIN.

9. AS A CONSEQUENCE OF LACK OF DRAUGHT ANIMALS AND

EQUIPMENT AND FEAR OF INJURY, BARBER SAID THAT FARMERS IN THE PLAIN OF JARS LAST YEAR DID NOT PRODUCE ENOUGH RICE TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES FOR THE COMING YEAR. BARBER OBSERVED FEW CHICKENS, MEAT ANIMALS, OR EGGS IN VILLAGES OR FOR SALE IN THE PHONSAVANH MARKET. HE SPECULATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT MUST CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THE RESETTLED POPULATION WITH FOOD TO STAVE OFF HUNGER.

10. A UNDP OFFICIAL SEPARATELY TOLD EMBOFF FEBRUARY 6 THAT FAO SOIL EXPERT GEORGE ROMAGNOLI SPENT THE LAST THREE WEEKS OF JANUARY IN PHONSAVANH ON A TRIP TO ESTABLISH A SOIL ANALYSIS LABORATORY. ROMAGNOLI WAS REPORTEDLY DISCOURAGED ABOUT ESTABLISHING LABORATORY BECAUSE OF THE UNENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION BY LOCAL PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES. RECOMMENDATIONS OF AUTHORITIES FROM THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE IN VIENTIANE APPARENTLY CARRIED LITTLE CLOUT WITH THE INDEPENDENT LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN PHONSAVANH.

12. ROMAGNOLI WAS ACCOMPANIED BY TWO HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL COMMUNE EXPERTS. THEY REPORTEDLY WERE ALSO DISCOURAGED WITH THE PROSPECTS OF ESTABLISHING AN EXPERIMENTAL FARM IN PHONSAVANH BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF LOCAL RESOURCES AND DIFFICULTY IN TRANSPORTING SUPPLIES.

13. ROMAGNOLI AND THE TWO HUNGARIANS FLEW TO PHONSAVANH AND MET A TEAM OF LAO AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS WHO JOURNEYED THERE BY JEEP. THE LAO PARTY REPORTEDLY TOOK TWO WEEKS TO MAKE THE 175 KILOMETER TRIP FROM
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PAGE 03 VIENTI 00292 02 OF 02 120436Z

VIENTIANE BECAUSE OF THE ROUGH, IN SOME SPOTS NON-EXISTENT, ROADS. WHEN ROMAGNOLI FINALLY FLEW BACK TO VIENTIANE HE WAS REPORTEDLY ACCOMPANIED BY A SOVIET AID TECHNICIANS.
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